

Editorial: How to build a community

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The residents of Fernwood appear to be big believers in the principle: If you want something done right, do it yourself.

Members of the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group want to make their “urban village” a better place for families, so they are putting money and work into shaping what it will look like. They don’t want to make the funky village bigger, just better.

With the Belfry Theatre as a centrepiece and unique eating places a few steps apart, the Fernwood village already has a distinctive atmosphere. Rather than relying on developers to understand that atmosphere, the residents are taking the work in hand themselves.

The neighbourhood group has signed agreements to purchase two properties, at 2009 Fernwood Rd. and 1310 Gladstone Ave. With help from an architectural firm, the members plan to develop ground-level business space with one or two storeys of affordable housing above.

It might sound like an unusual endeavour for a community organization. Usually, developers make such plans, and residents’ groups say either yea or nay. But the Fernwood outfit is already an old hand when it comes to affordable housing.

They renovated the Cornerstone Building in 2006 to create retail space and housing. Two years later, they bought two vacant lots and built six housing units. The group also owns other commercial space in the village, with revenues funding services to families and helping to keep the rents low on the housing units.

It’s a community attitude that others could learn from, with residents shaping their village with bricks and mortar to create homes for new neighbours.

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